

Grasses of South Australia

An illustrated guide to the native and naturalized species

by John Jessup, Gilbert RM Dashorst and Fiona M James

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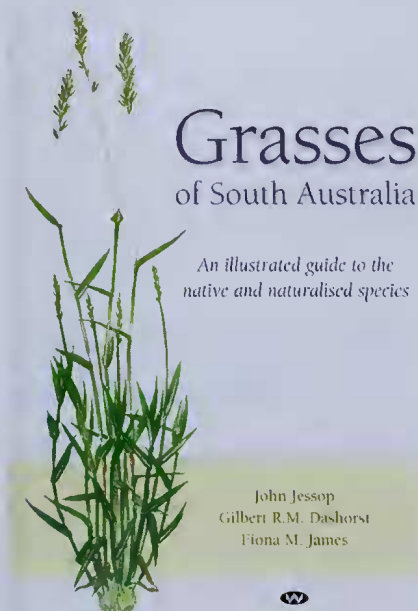
The authors introduce us to *Grasses of South Australia* by providing a history of the project. *Grasses of South Australia* began with a proposal by the Native Grass Resources Group to the Botanic Gardens of Adelaide and State Herbarium for a revised edition of the grass treatment in the 1986 *Flora of South Australia*. More than 36% of the names in *Grasses of South Australia* were not included in the 1986 flora, showing how vital was the need for a revision. This figure includes newly recognised grasses and corrected names.

Identifying grasses is notoriously difficult, and it is important to understand grass morphology and associated terms. The authors provide an excellent drawing of 'the typical grass plant', at the same time explaining that in a family of about 10 000 species a lot of variation occurs, and many species would bear no resemblance to the

'typical' grass. An excellent glossary is provided with many diagrams illustrating some of the more unusual terms such as puberulent, muricate or hispid surfaces and extravaginal and intravaginal shoots. Whether for those new to grass identification or those with some previous experience of botanical terminology, the glossary is a necessity as some of the terms used have a slightly different meaning from those occurring with other plant groups.

An illustrated key designed for those with limited knowledge of grass morphology and terminology precedes the key proper. The illustrations are excellent and easily allow identification of grasses into groups. Some of the more recognisable genera and species can be identified directly from the illustrations. These genera and species are eliminated early in the written key. Subsequent characters divide the family into groups from A-P. Smaller keys then divide these groups into genera. The groups from A-P are simply for convenience to facilitate identification of the genera, but also allow many genera to occur in more than one group. This is important where there are differences in key characteristics of species within a single genus. For example, *Distichlis* occurs in group K, which consists of species with a panicle, awned spikelets and with three or more bisexual lemmas, and in group P, which also has species with a panicle but spikelets do not have awns and have two or more bisexual lemmas.

Being experienced in the use of many keys for many different plant groups I always have found that division of a key into smaller sections is far more user friendly than a single large key. The smaller sections are not as daunting in the first instance, and allow one to determine if a mistake has been made earlier than when using a larger key.



Once specimens have been identified to genus, the index must be consulted to determine the page on which the genus is described. Depending on the number of species within the genus, a further key is supplied to identify the species. A description of each species follows, along with an account of its distribution and notes on its ecology. The accompanying drawings are expertly done and help confirm correct identification.

Grasses of South Australia is a much needed work. It is highly recommended and provides information in a simple and user friendly manner, enabling all with an interest in grasses to identify specimens from this huge family, regardless of their level of expertise!

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Mayfly Sonnet

no longer green around the gills
he is unsheathed from adolescence

four-oared and paddling the airwaves
in a kind of semaphore, his present tense

is part Icarus and part Romeo
blindly conforming in a blizzard of silent fervour—

confetti to choke the throats of animals
and smooth the tread of tyres—

until the complicit gesturing of time
and cosmic forces skew his balance and weight

his movements; a muddle of spirals
and spins that exposes nature's counterfeit

as merely a scent, drifting in earthly currents
betraying all in his nothingness

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